

Fast 19: Holy Prophet's extraordinary gentleness towards his followers – 2

- Towards the end of his life, when the eastern Roman (Byzantine) empire started to threaten to attack Arabia, the Holy Prophet had to lead an expedition to Tabuk, a place halfway between Madinah and Damascus, to counter this threat. He had with him an army of 30,000. As the threatened Roman attack did not materialize, the Holy Prophet returned without fighting, after concluding peace treaties with various Christian tribes in the area. If he had wanted to convert anyone to Islam by force, or if he had wanted to conquer land, he had an easy opportunity to do so. But he did none of this, and despite all the expense and trouble of this expedition, he brought his army back to Madinah.
- To join the expedition required great sacrifice, of effort, money, resources and time by his followers. There were some Muslims who routinely failed to make sacrifices on such occasions. They did the same this time. They were “fair weather” friends who joined in only when Muslims were winning and making gains. The Quran says to the Holy Prophet about them:

“Had it been a near gain and a short journey, they would certainly have followed you, but the hard journey was too long for them.” — 9:42

لَوْ كَانَ عَرَضًا قَرِيبًا وَسَفَرًا قَاصِدًا لَاتَّبَعُوكَ وَ
لَكِنَّ بَعْدَتَ عَلَيْهِمُ الشَّقَّةُ ط

- Eventually, the Holy Prophet refused to accept any zakat or financial contributions from them, as these were not sacrifices which were made when needed by the community.
- There were also some sincere Muslims who failed to join the expedition to Tabuk for various reasons, while wishing to do so. The Quran says:

“⁹¹No blame lies on the weak, nor on the sick, nor on those who can find nothing to spend, if they are sincere to Allah and His Messenger. There is no way (to blame) against the doers of good. And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful —

لَيْسَ عَلَى الضَّعْفَاءِ وَلَا عَلَى الْمَرْضَى وَلَا عَلَى الَّذِينَ لَا
يَجِدُونَ مَا يُنْفِقُونَ حَرَجٌ إِذَا نَصَحُوا لِلَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ط
مَا عَلَى الْمُحْسِنِينَ مِنْ سَبِيلٍ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ
﴿٤١﴾

⁹²Nor on those to whom, when they came to you (O Prophet) that you should (provide animals to) carry them, you said: I cannot find anything on which to carry you. They went back, their eyes overflowing with tears of grief that they could not find anything to spend.

وَلَا عَلَى الَّذِينَ إِذَا مَا اتَّوَكَّلُوا لَمْ يُحْمَلْهُمُ قُلُوبًا لَأَجْدِ مَا
أَحْمَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ تَوَلَّوْا وَأَعْيُنُهُمْ تَفِيضُ مِنَ
الدَّمْعِ حَزَنًا أَلَّا يَجِدُوا مَا يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾ ط

⁹³The way (to blame) is only against those who ask permission of you (not to go), though they are rich. They have chosen to be with those who remained behind; and Allah has sealed their hearts, so they do not know.” — 9:91–93

إِنَّمَا السَّبِيلُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ يَسْتَأْذِنُونَكَ وَهُمْ أَغْنِيَاءُ
رَضُوا بِأَنْ يَكُونُوا مَعَ الْخَوَالِفِ وَطَبَعَ اللَّهُ عَلَى
قُلُوبِهِمْ فَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٩٣﴾

Those Muslims for whom it was beyond their control or capacity to join the expedition or provide resources for it do not bear the least blame. Then verse 92 paints a heart-rending picture of those who wished to participate but did not have any means of their own, nor could the Holy Prophet find any way of taking them. They were heart broken.

Those who are unable to bear the burden of making any sacrifice, and are sincere, are entirely blameless and forgiven. The blamed are those who could do something but failed to do it as an intentional decision on their part. These teachings apply generally as well in relation to any religious duty or service. There is no blame on those who are physically or materially unable to carry out a duty, while they deeply desire to do so. The blame is on those who have the means to carry them out but remain behind.

- There were some Muslims who, while being sincere, held back from the expedition due to laxity or slackness. They admitted their fault to the Holy Prophet after he returned from the expedition. The Quran says about them:

¹⁰²And others have acknowledged their faults — they mixed a good deed with another that was evil. It may be that Allah will turn to them (mercifully). Surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.

وَأَخْرُونَ اعْتَرَفُوا بِذُنُوبِهِمْ خَلَطُوا عَمَلًا صَالِحًا وَ
أَخْرَسِينَ عَسَى اللَّهُ أَنْ يَتُوبَ عَلَيْهِمْ إِنْ اللَّهُ
غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١٠٢﴾

¹⁰³Take charity out of their property — you would cleanse them and purify them thereby — and pray for them. Surely your prayer is a relief to them. And Allah is Hearing, Knowing.” — 9:102–103

خُذْ مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ صَدَقَةً تُطَهِّرُهُمْ وَتُزَكِّيهِمْ بِهَا وَ
صَلِّ عَلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ صَلَاتَكَ سَكَنٌ لَهُمْ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ
عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٠٣﴾

The persons mentioned in verses 102–103 were those sincere Muslims who could have gone but made a mistake in deciding not to go, perhaps not realising the importance of the expedition. When the Holy Prophet returned, they acknowledged that they had made a mistake. The Holy Prophet is told to accept their donations (which he did not accept from the “fair weather” friends), as this act of repentance would purify them. Even though they had failed to come to the help of the Holy Prophet, he is told by God to pray for them, because his prayers for them brought comfort to their hearts.